

Chapter 6 Neighborhoods & Housing

Introduction

A major goal of this plan is to improve the livability of the City's neighborhoods. For existing neighborhoods, this may be achieved through conservation, stabilization and revitalization activities. For new neighborhoods, the City plans to provide new zoning and subdivision mechanisms to encourage attractive and vital new residential areas to be constructed.

Background

Neighborhoods

Citizens are proud of their neighborhoods and protective of them. Concerns frequently cited about neighborhoods include the appearance of neighborhoods, the low level of upkeep of some of the houses, the conversion of single family homes into rental apartments, and the turning of lawns into parking lots. It is sometimes felt that the conversion of homes into student apartments has acted as a destabilizing force, reducing property values and the livability of neighborhoods for families.

In some areas there are instances where zoning has allowed incompatible industrial or commercial uses within or adjacent to residential areas; adversely affecting the livability of the neighborhood. Traffic impacts of large new developments, such as shopping centers and apartment complexes can also affect neighborhoods.

This plan recommends that citizens be involved in efforts to conserve, stabilize, and revitalize their neighborhoods. The plan also recommends that detailed neighborhood plans be prepared to address the issues brought up by citizens and that residents of the neighborhoods be engaged to help prepare these plans.

Housing

In the past, it has been felt that large complexes of single residential types were not the best types of neighborhoods. New neighborhoods offering a mix of housing types are a better use of land to a number of citizens. Included within this plan's recommendations are revisions to the Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map to allow a wider variety of single family residential housing types, to restrict the development of more large multifamily housing complexes, and to provide a more balanced range of housing choices.

The characteristics of Harrisonburg's housing stock, such as the mix of housing types, tenure, vacancy rates, age and condition, provide insight into the housing opportunities available within the City, as well as the City's general economic vitality. This information has been gathered from the U.S. Census Bureau, the Harrisonburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority (HRHA), and from City building permit data.

Housing Supply: According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Harrisonburg's housing stock totaled 13,689 units in the year 2000 and by estimates provided by the American Community Survey (ACS) has grown to 15,595 units in 2008. An estimate based on City building permit data,

however, brings the total housing units to approximately 17,014 as of the end of 2008. Table 6-1 presents trends in the mix of housing types within the City's housing stock since 1990. Single-family detached units currently comprise approximately 32 percent of the City's housing stock, single-family attached units (townhouses and duplexes) 23 percent, multi-family units about 42 percent, and mobile homes and other miscellaneous units make up the remaining approximately two percent. This shows an increasing shift away from single family detached units towards single family attached units.

Since 2000, there has been a decrease in the percent of the housing stock that is single family detached, and of the 3,325 new housing units permitted, 529 of them, or about 16 percent, were for single family detached dwellings; 54 percent for duplexes and townhouses and 30 percent for multi-family. Years 2007 and 2008 saw a surge in multi-family units permitted with 410 and 468 units respectively, which were the highest number of multi-family units permitted in a single year since 1989. Both the 1989 and recent surges were in response to plans for increased enrollment at James Madison University (JMU).

Table 6-1. Trends in Housing Mix, 1990-2008, Harrisonburg

Housing Unit Type	1990		2000		2008	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number[^]	Percent[^]
Single-Family Detached	4,599	42.2%	5,203	38.0%	5,732	32.4%
Duplex and Townhouse	1,700	15.6%	2,382	17.4%	4,164	23.4%
Multi-Family	4,200	38.5%	5,792	42.3%	6,806	42.4%
Mobile Homes & Other*	401	3.7	312	2.3	312	1.8%
TOTAL	10,900	100%	13,689	100%	17,014	100%

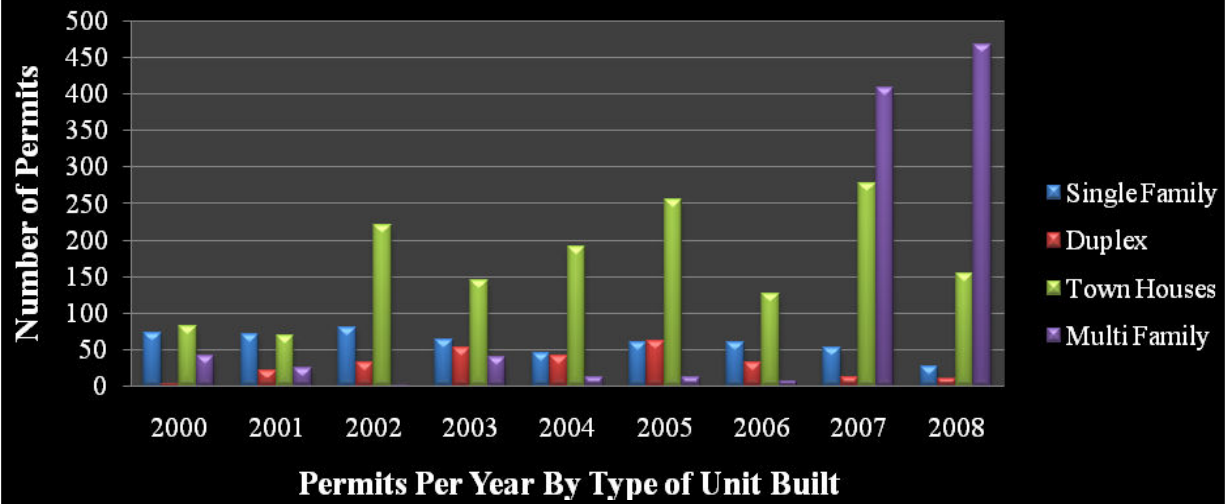
Source: 1990-2000 Censuses of Population & Housing; 2008 estimate from City Building Permit Data

* Includes 9 "Other living quarters", such as an RV.

[^]Based upon City of Harrisonburg building permit data.

Figure 6-1 illustrates building permit data for the last nine years. Single family construction has decreased during this time period, while townhouses have grown at a fairly constant rate since 2002 and multi-family units have seen a boom in 2007 and 2008.

Figure 6-1: Analysis of Harrisonburg Building Permit Data



Occupancy and Tenure: Table 6-2 provides 2000 Census data and 2005-2007 ACS data on the occupancy rates and tenure (units owned or rented) of the City's housing stock. The level of detail available for the vacant housing units available in the 2000 Census is not available for 2005-2007. Of the 13,689 total housing units reported by the Census within Harrisonburg as of April 2000, only about four percent were vacant. There is a trend toward a greater percentage of housing in rental vs. owner-occupied units within the City, with rental units increasing from 54.7 percent of all housing in 1990 to 61 percent and 60.8 percent in 2000 and 2005 – 2007 respectively.

**Table 6-2. Housing Occupancy and Tenure
Harrisonburg, 2000 and 2006-2008**

SUBJECT	2000		2006-2008		2000-2008 Percent Change in Numbers of Units
	#	%	#	%	
OCCUPANCY STATUS					
Total Housing Units	13,689	100%	15,595	100%	13.9%
Occupied housing units	13,133	95.9%	14,291	91.6 %	8.8%
Vacant housing units	556	4.1%	1,304	8.3%	135%
TENURE					
Occupied Housing Units	13,133	100%	14,291	100%	8.8%
Owner-occupied units	5,125	39%	5,642	39.5%	10.1%
Renter-occupied units	8,008	61%	8,649	60.5%	8%
VACANCY STATUS					
Vacant Housing Units	556	100%	1,304	100%	135%
For rent	274	49.3%	N/A	N/A	N/A
For sale only	86	15.5%	N/A	N/A	N/A
Rented or sold, not occupied	75	13.5%	N/A	N/A	N/A
For seasonal, recreational or occasional use	37	6.7%	N/A	N/A	N/A
For migrant workers	1	0.2%	N/A	N/A	N/A
Other vacant	83	14.9%	N/A	N/A	N/A
VACANCY RATES					
		%		%	Change in Percentage
Homeowner vacancy rate		1.7%		0.4%	-1.3%
Rental vacancy rate		3.3%		1.9%	-1.4%

Source: US Census Bureau, 2000 Census and 2006-2008 American Community Survey

There are two vacancy rates shown in Table 6-2. The homeowner vacancy rate is the proportion of vacant units for sale to the total homeowner inventory. It is determined by dividing the number of vacant for-sale units by the sum of the City's owner-occupied units and vacant for-sale units. The rental vacancy rate is the proportion of vacant rental units to the total rental housing inventory. It is found by dividing the number of vacant units for rent by the sum of the City's renter-occupied units and the number of vacant units for rent.

Student Housing: The impact of JMU and Eastern Mennonite University (EMU) student housing demands must be considered in any Harrisonburg housing study. During the 2008-2009 academic year, JMU housed approximately 5,774 students in on campus residence halls, which is 36 percent of the on campus full time undergraduates. This left approximately 10,264 students to find off campus housing. In academic year 2007-2008, EMU housed approximately 58 percent of its 1,234 students in campus housing.

It was previously mentioned that the numbers of permits issued for multi-family units in 2007 and 2008 were the highest since 1989. The number of townhouse units permitted was 278 in 2007 and 153 in 2008. Many townhouse units constructed are marketed almost exclusively to students, containing as many as 4 bedrooms and 4 bathrooms per unit. This increase in student rentals was largely in response to the State Council of Higher Education in Virginia's release of a projected enrollment increase at JMU of 3,800 "on campus" students between the fall of 2006 and the fall of 2013. With the number of student housing units recently constructed and under construction, there should be no problem housing those that desire off campus housing. In fact, there will be some surpluses in student housing until enrollment increases catch up with the additional housing. Furthermore, the Harrisonburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority's 2005 Analysis cited that "since the early 2000s, apartments catering to students have also turned to other markets, such as the emergent immigrant population who can utilize the large numbers of bedrooms in student apartments."

Housing Value and Housing Costs: Housing costs and housing values affect who can afford to live in a community; those same variables can also impact the economic health of the community. Housing costs and values also reflect the relative supply of housing and can be an indication of the desirability of the community as a place to live.

As can be seen from Table 6-3, the median value of an owner-occupied house in Harrisonburg is the second highest of all area jurisdictions. The value of the City's housing however, has not grown as rapidly as the value of housing in the other area jurisdictions since 2000.

**Table 6-3. Median Value of Owner-Occupied Housing
Harrisonburg and Area Jurisdictions
1990 through 2008**

Locality	1990	2000	2008	Percent Change 1990-2000	Percent Change 2000-2008
Harrisonburg	\$89,326	\$122,700	\$201,100	37.4%	63.9%
Charlottesville	\$85,000	\$117,800	\$265,800	38.6%	125.6%
Staunton	\$62,600	\$87,500	\$154,100	39.8%	76.1%
Waynesboro	\$67,600	\$89,300	\$159,600	32.1%	78.7%
Augusta County	\$70,200	\$110,900	\$181,400	58.0%	63.6%
Rockingham County	\$71,800	\$107,700	\$192,300	50.0%	78.6%

Source: 2004 Comprehensive Plan, 2006-2008 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau

This relative low rate of increase in value is probably due in large part to the number of attached housing units permitted since 2000. Based on the conclusions of a 2005 HRHA housing analysis

this is attributable primarily to the increases in the number of attached housing units constructed and to the trend to develop higher priced single family housing in the County. This analysis, like its 2000 predecessor, cites a primary reason for this as a lack of attractive, appropriately zoned land in the City and the availability of more easily developed and affordable tracts within the County. Although not documented, higher development costs within the City were also noted as a contributing factor in this trend.

Existing Affordable Housing Programs: While there is a desire to increase the availability of high-end housing within the City, there still exists a need for affordable owner-occupied housing units. Harrisonburg is fortunate to have an active and successful redevelopment and housing authority in the HRHA, which has been addressing the affordable housing needs of City residents since 1955. One of the principal housing goals of HRHA during the coming years is to focus on increasing homeownership opportunities for low- and moderate-income City residents.

The authority's Local Homeownership Development Loan Program lends construction funds to non-profit organizations such as Hope Community Builders to build affordable homes to sell to moderate-income families. The authority has committed \$100,000 for this program each fiscal year since 1992. Down payment assistance to qualifying purchasers in this program is provided through forgivable loans from its Residential Mortgage Loan Program.

The authority's homeownership initiatives received a major boost in 2002 with the creation of the Valley Housing Alliance (VHA), which is a partnership of existing community housing organizations, including HRHA, Hope Community Builders, Rebuild Harrisonburg/Rockingham County, and Central Virginia Habitat for Humanity. The goal of the alliance is to collaborate on programs that promote affordable housing and diminish substandard housing conditions in the Harrisonburg/Rockingham area.

Rental Housing Costs: Rental rates increased substantially between 2000 and 2008. The Census Bureau collects data on gross rent, which is the monthly rental rate plus the average monthly cost of utilities. According to the ACS, the median gross rent increased from \$480 per month in 2000 to \$739 per month in 2006 – 2008. These same data sources also show a steady increase in the percentage of households that paid more than 35 percent of their monthly household income for rent from approximately 19 percent of households in 1990 to almost 34 percent in 2000 and 46 percent in 2006-2008. Keep in mind however, that these figures do include the large number of student households in the City, where parents are paying many of the rents. The HRHA 2005 Housing Analysis estimates that 72 percent of all student renter households and 53 percent of all non-student renter households had incomes under \$30,000. Although this study estimates the number of student vs. non-student renter households, there is no information provided on the rents of non-student households.

Subsidized Rental Housing: According to the HRHA housing study, the City has 1,285 subsidized apartment units, 100 units of project based housing, 917 Section 8 apartment units, and 268 affordable apartment units built under the Federal Low Income Housing Tax Credit program. According to the HRHA Executive Director, the Section 8 units built between 1975 and 1985 are beginning to be converted to market rate units as federal law permits. The HRHA's Section 8 voucher program had a waiting list of 532 persons as of December 2008. Sixty of the

100 units of project-based housing are in the process of a major rolling renovation project and will not be totally available for rental until late 2010. Nevertheless, 40 of the 100 units of project-based housing had a waiting list of 66 as of July 2009. The Authority's Lineweaver Section 8 elderly apartments have a waiting list of 49. Therefore, the need for affordable rental housing still exists within the area.

Summary of Housing Issues: There are a number of housing issues facing the City in the coming years. These include the continuing need for affordable rental housing, the need to improve the balance of owner- vs. renter-occupied housing and the percentage of higher end vs. subsidized housing, and a lack of suitable land for single-family detached housing development within the City.

Affordable Housing – Housing is generally defined as affordable when the occupant is paying no more than 30 percent of his or her income for gross housing costs, including utilities. When the term affordable housing is used however, it usually refers to housing affordable to households falling in the low to moderate income range, with incomes at or below 80 percent of the locality's median household income. The 2005 HRHA Housing Analysis shows ethnic households make up a disproportionately large portion (54 percent) of the lower-moderate income group (in the income range between \$22,750 and \$30,500). With the growth in this segment of the population, combined with the existing waiting lists for all of HRHA's affordable housing continuing, the need for affordable rental housing persists.

Homeownership Rate – As noted, rental housing units have increasingly dominated the City's housing stock during the past several decades. The recent growth in multi-family housing aimed mainly at off campus students, the decrease in single family detached permits issued and the fact that many of the single family attached housing units being developed are intended for use as rental properties, show that this disparity between owner and renter occupancy is still in a growth mode.

Lack of Higher Priced Housing Opportunities – Both the 2000 and 2005 HRHA studies confirmed that the majority of higher priced homes are being constructed in Rockingham County. The studies cited this was due in part to a lack of suitable single-family residential land in the City and higher development costs within the City. Remaining R-1 zoned land was reported to have topographic and limestone problems and to be on the west side of Harrisonburg, while the demand for single-family units was reported to be primarily east of I-81. Although not identified as a legally supportable strategy, the study recommended the City consider providing incentives in return for development of higher priced homes with on site amenities, and encourage the development of innovative techniques for active adult housing in the higher price range. This would provide the City with a unique marketing niche, rather than attempting to compete with the county for the larger-lot single-family home market. Marketing to empty nesters and retirees has the added advantage of attracting fewer school-aged children per household than a typical single-family home, which can further be viewed positively as these households would not place additional strain on the City's education system.

Neighborhoods & Housing Goals, Objectives and Strategies

Goal 3. To strengthen existing neighborhoods and promote the development of new neighborhoods that are quiet, safe, beautiful, walkable, enhance social interaction, and offer a balanced range of housing choices.

Objective 3.1 To work with neighborhoods to identify neighborhood strengths, weaknesses and needs and to develop plans of action for neighborhood improvement.

Strategy 3.1.1 To develop a priority list of neighborhoods, for which neighborhood improvement plans will be developed, focusing first on the neighborhood conservation areas identified on the Plan Framework Map.

Strategy 3.1.2 To review the priority list annually as neighborhood plans are completed and as issues and priorities change.

Strategy 3.1.3 To develop and implement a planning approach and process that assures involvement of residents and landowners in preparing the plans for their neighborhoods (e.g., neighborhood planning task force, resident/owner input sessions, neighborhood design charrettes, etc.)

Strategy 3.1.4 To assist neighborhoods in setting up appropriate neighborhood representative organizations to assist the City and other partners in implementing neighborhood plans.

Strategy 3.1.5 To involve all appropriate City departments and programs in the neighborhood planning process to insure a coordinated planning and implementation effort.

Objective 3.2 To limit the conversion of single family houses into duplexes and apartments in residential neighborhoods.

Strategy 3.2.1 To review the City's ordinances for any further revisions needed to prevent or limit conversions.

Strategy 3.2.2 To develop a set of policies to limit rezonings and special use permits for conversions. Such policies should contain criteria regarding the locations and neighborhood and building conditions that warrant permission of conversion as well as neighborhood plan recommendations regarding conversions to rental housing.

Strategy 3.2.3 To train City staff to be vigilant in the approval of kitchen and bath additions that might lead to apartment conversions and to obtain affidavits from homeowners making such additions as to their intentions.

Strategy 3.2.4 To consider implementing a rental housing registration and/or inspection program to enforce occupancy restrictions and maintain records on approved rental units, among other program goals. Sufficient funding will need to be secured to establish this new program.

- Objective 3.3 To promote well designed new neighborhoods in the furtherance of this goal.
- Strategy 3.3.1 To develop a zoning approach to require, permit and/or create incentives for the development of new residential neighborhoods that contain a mix of housing types, in areas shown on the plan framework map.
- Strategy 3.3.2 To include in the City’s land use codes and manuals design provisions and performance standards to improve the design quality of all residential development. Such provisions and standards may address:
- Building setback and orientation standards that enhance social interaction.
 - Street system design that promotes connectivity and addresses traffic calming measures to reduce speeding.
 - Requirements for sidewalks and trails that facilitate and encourage walking and bicycle use.
 - Streetscape planting requirements.
 - Standards for the placement of parking areas and garages so as to avoid streetscapes dominated by parking lots and garage doors.
 - Size, quality, design, character, and facilities for preserved open spaces.
- Strategy 3.3.3 To require, permit and/or provide incentives for “open space” or “cluster” development so as to preserve green space within new subdivisions.
- Objective 3.4 To develop approaches to increase the percentage of single family detached housing units to a minimum of 45 percent of the total number of housing units in the City.
- Strategy 3.4.1 To approve new high density multi-family development for only select areas, as recommended in the Land Use Guide.
- Strategy 3.4.2 To review and amend the Zoning Ordinance so as to increase opportunities for single family residential development affordable to households in a range of incomes. Strategy 3.4.1 and Strategy 3.4.2 might be achieved by:
- Reviewing and revising the residential zones to permit small lot and innovative forms of single family residential development as appropriate.
- Objective 3.5 To consider and seek to mitigate the potential impacts of rezoning and public investment decisions on neighborhoods.
- Strategy 3.5.1 To require applicants for rezonings and special use permits to prepare and submit with their applications an impact analysis addressing such issues as: projected increase in population and demand for school

facilities and other public facilities, impacts on vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle traffic and circulation, water and sewer service needs, storm water run-off quantity and quality impacts, visual impacts, impacts to historic and environmental resources, etc. The analysis should address proposed measures to mitigate impacts. The level of analysis required should reflect the size and potential impact of the project.

Strategy 3.5.2 To prepare and submit to the Planning Commission and City Council similar impact analyses for public investment projects, such as roads, public buildings and other public facilities.

Strategy 3.5.3 To work with VDOT to reduce and mitigate adverse impacts of the future widening of I-81 on neighborhoods, businesses, and other areas along the corridor.

Goal 4. To meet the current and future needs of residents for affordable housing.

Objective 4.1 To study housing affordability in the region.

Strategy 4.1.1 To work with the Harrisonburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority and the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Continuum of Care to study and define housing affordability at the full range of income levels in the City and region.

Strategy 4.1.2 To work with Rockingham County to determine and obtain agreement on each locality's fair share of affordable housing within the City-county region and to develop goals for the provision of affordable housing.

Objective 4.2 To partner with the Harrisonburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority (HRHA), the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Continuum of Care, and other community housing providers (serving the elderly, disabled, homeless, low/moderate income families, victims of violence, etc.) to address community housing needs throughout the region.

Strategy 4.2.1 To support the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Continuum of Care to monitor and develop programs to meet City-County affordable housing goals.

Strategy 4.2.2 To include as Harrisonburg-Rockingham Continuum of Care members all significant players in the regional housing market, such as, the City of Harrisonburg, Rockingham County, the Harrisonburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority, the Valley Housing Alliance, non-profit community housing providers (serving the elderly, disabled, homeless, low/moderate income families, victims of violence, etc.), and private sector housing developers and providers, etc., as well as other interested parties, including Harrisonburg City Public Schools and Rockingham County Public Schools.

- Strategy 4.2.3 To assist in the implementation of Harrisonburg-Rockingham Continuum of Care affordable housing programs.
- Strategy 4.2.4 To consider implementing a rental housing inspection and/or registration program to ensure that such housing is decent as well as affordable and to enforce occupancy restrictions and maintain records on approved rental units. Sufficient funding will need to be secured to establish this new program.

- Objective 4.3 To promote home ownership so as to increase the proportion of owner-occupied units in the City.
 - Strategy 4.3.1 To support expansion of the Family Self-Sufficiency and Lease to Homeownership programs of the Harrisonburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority and other home ownership programs that might be developed by HRHA.
 - Strategy 4.3.2 To work with private developers, non-profit community housing providers and rental housing providers to offer home-ownership opportunities for first-time low-moderate income homeowners (e.g., through HOME, Hope VI and other available housing programs).

- Objective 4.4 To identify areas of the City for affordable housing while promoting mixed income housing neighborhoods.
 - Strategy 4.4.1 To designate the entire City as an area within the region currently providing housing affordable to a wide range of income levels.
 - Strategy 4.4.2 To designate mixed use areas on the Land Use Guide as potential locations for new housing affordable to a wide range of income levels, including low to moderate income households.

- Objective 4.5 To support the development and adoption of a Ten Year Plan to end chronic homelessness in the City of Harrisonburg, as part of the goal to end chronic homelessness and help to move families and individuals into permanent housing.
 - Strategy 4.5.1 To establish a taskforce to research and develop a Ten Year Plan document for the City of Harrisonburg.
 - Strategy 4.5.2 To support the adoption of an action plan for the City.
 - Strategy 4.5.3 To create an action plan to implement a Ten Year Plan for the City of Harrisonburg.
 - Strategy 4.5.4 To support the implementation of the Plan.

- Objective 4.6 To promote Fair Housing policies in the City of Harrisonburg.

- Strategy 4.6.1 To establish a taskforce comprised of governmental, non profit and business entities to identify local fair housing barriers, solutions, and the development of an action plan.
- Strategy 4.6.2 To support the implementation of an action plan to promote Fair Housing policies within the City of Harrisonburg.